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FOOTBALL SUNDAY EDITION



CARSON WENTZ



DEMARIO DAVIS



DREW BREES

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FOOTBALL SUNDAY | 2018

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CARSON WENTZ

"I will come back stronger
than ever."

The inside back cover of Sports Spectrum is dedicated to helping you share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The HISTORY of FOOTBALL Sunday



DREW BREES
FOOTBALL SUNDAY 2016

"After my fifth NFL season, I was going into an offseason where I didn't have a contract; I was going to be a free agent. I got hurt the very last game of the 2005 season with the San Diego Chargers. I knew immediately, that besides a broken neck, this was the absolute worst injury I could ever have asked for as a quarterback. As I was walking off the field with my shoulder stuck in the air because it was dislocated, I was thinking, 'I'm probably never going to put on a Chargers uniform again.' And then it hits me that I might never play football again."

"A few short months later – six months post-Hurricane Katrina – my wife and I took a trip to visit New Orleans. We were looking at the sheer devastation and just saying, 'I'm not going to trust what I see with my eyes here because my eyes are telling me not to come here.' And yet, in my heart and my soul the Lord was telling me that this was my calling. It wasn't just about coming to play football and being a part of a resurgence of an organization, but it's about the resurrection and rebirth of a city. And we can be a part of that."



FOOTBALL SUNDAY 2015

Format: 28-minute sermon replacement video

Featuring: Brandon Marshall, Matt Hasselbeck, Russell Wilson, Russell O'Kung, Matthew Slater, Nate Solder

Hosted By: Trent Dilfer

Audience Reached: 1,400 churches; 616,000 people viewed

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Our goal was to have 250 churches show the video, but to our surprise we reached more than 1,400!
- 98% of churches said they would participate in 2016



FOOTBALL SUNDAY 2017

Format: 28- and 12-minute main videos, three five-minute videos, three-week teaching series

Featuring: Anquan Boldin, Brandon Marshall, D'Brickashaw Ferguson, Matthew Slater, Devin McCourty, Nate Solder

Hosted By: Benjamin Watson with narration by James Brown of CBS

Audience Reached: 3,217 churches; Hillsong Channel distribution

HIGHLIGHTS:

- According to pastor surveys, more than 15,000 people came to Christ
- Football Sunday appeared on the Hillsong Channel 30 minutes before gametime



FOOTBALL SUNDAY 2016

Format: 28- and 12-minute videos, three-week teaching series

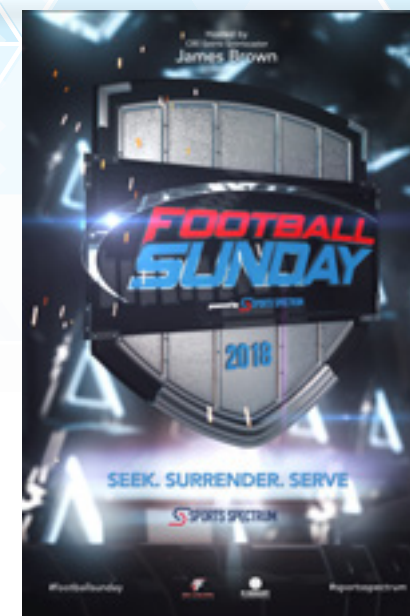
Featuring: Trent Dilfer, Drew Brees, Thomas Davis Sr., DeMarcus Ware, Charles Tillman

Hosted By: Trent Dilfer and Miles McPherson

Audience Reached: 3,008 churches; 1.323 million people viewed

HIGHLIGHTS:

- According to pastor surveys, more than 5,000 people came to Christ
- Feedback from more than 400 pastors was overwhelmingly supportive
- We discovered Super Bowl Sunday had become the third largest church attendance day for churches participating in Football Sunday



FOOTBALL SUNDAY 2018

Format: 28- and 12-minute main videos, three five-minute videos, three-week teaching series

Featuring: Matt Forte, Josh McCown, Chris Maragos, Malcolm Jenkins, Carson Wentz

Hosted By: James Brown of CBS

CURRENT HIGHLIGHTS:

This year we are producing 200,000 Football Sunday Magazines that will be the focal point of a 25,000-person outreach team in the Twin Cities, the home of this year's Super Bowl. Led by 400 local pastors, the team will blanket the city in prayer and reach out to people in person. This will be a model we look to replicate in every Super Bowl city from now on.

"THIS VIDEO REALLY TOUCHED MY SOUL!
KNOWING THAT THERE ARE A BODY OF BELIEVERS IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL WHO ARE NOT ASHAMED
OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IS AMAZING" - FOOTBALL SUNDAY 2017 VIEWER

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OUTREACH EVENT OF THE YEAR!**

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HOSTED BY:

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SEEK

SNIPPETS FROM FOOTBALL SUNDAY 2018

*"Seek first the Kingdom of God and all
these things will be added to you."
- Matthew 6:33*



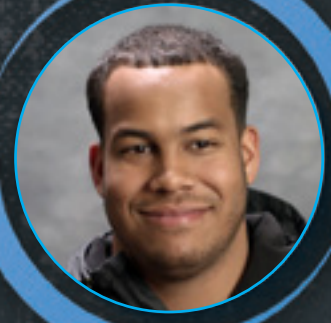
MATT FORTE

Seeking God requires intentionality, not just routinely listening to a sermon on Sunday or going to chapel before a game. It's about meditating on God's Word throughout each day. In the morning on my way to work, I don't turn on the radio; instead I talk to God. On the way home, I listen to a sermon that can bring me wisdom and insight into God's truth. Seeking God requires a posture of saying, "Lord, I want to know You more. I want to grow in relationship with You."



DEMARIO DAVIS

As Christ-followers, we need to be continually seeking God. Look to God for guidance and strength in every situation of life. Look for God in your marriage, as you raise your children, in your career, in your community. Every morning when we wake up, we have to seek God's face and say, "God, I need you to guide every step that I take because when I walk out of these doors, the world and Satan are going to be busy. God, I need to be able to see You." There is freedom when we look at Him to be our strength.



JORDAN HICKS

To me, seeking shows action and pursuit. In order to seek something, you have to put in effort and work. For me, when you seek something, you're putting everything aside and resting in the peace, joy and fulfillment that Christ brings. A lot of times, I focus so much on the game that it takes away from my time. When my focus is elsewhere, my time is not being spent with Christ and in the Word. You want to put work into the gifts Christ has given you, but at the same time, you have to make seeking Him first.

SURRENDER

SNIPPETS FROM FOOTBALL SUNDAY 2018

*"Then Jesus said to His disciples,
'Whoever wants to be My disciple
must deny themselves and take
up their cross and follow Me.'"*
— Matthew 16:24

JOSH McCOWN

The word "surrender" often brings up a negative feeling in us because we feel like it means to "give up" or "quit." But when Jesus said this to the crowd, He understood they were trying to "do enough" to get into the Kingdom of God. Jesus was telling them, "You're trying so hard to measure up that it's suffocating you. If you just surrender and follow Me, you'll find a peace beyond understanding." Jesus is calling you into a life that may be different from what you thought might satisfy you, but ultimately it will bring you peace.

CHRIS MARAGOS

So many people look at the word "surrender" as a sign of weakness, but in reality, it's more of a sign of entrusting. We have the opportunity to surrender to something that we actually gain from. When you surrender your will, you're done living the rat race of trying to fulfill and satisfy yourself, and in turn the Lord gives you peace, joy and a purpose. It also gives you the opportunity to edify and help grow those around you. And the true reward is that we get to spend eternity with Him, and that's what we long for.

KELVIN BEACHUM

I used to be living a double life. I showed up to all the Christian events on campus but nobody really knew who I was. I knew the way of Christ, but I didn't want to live that way; I wanted to do my own thing. There are things that I did in my past that should have brought me to jail, but by the grace of God, He opened my eyes and turned my life around. God really saved me from myself and since I've now fully surrendered to Him, my life has radically changed.

SERVE

SNIPPETS FROM FOOTBALL SUNDAY 2018

*"For even the Son of Man did not come
to be served, but to serve, and to give
His life as a ransom for many."*
— Mark 10:45

MALCOM JENKINS

There's no way you can live a Christlike life and not serve in some capacity. When you look at Jesus' life in the Bible, that's all His life was: service. His whole purpose in coming to this Earth was to die for us, not to fulfill some dream that He had. I think service is at the root of a Christlike life. One of the ways we share the Gospel is not just by speaking it, but by showing that Christlike manner through service, especially to people who don't deserve it, aren't seeking it, or aren't expecting it.

MATT FORTE

Jesus' first commission is to make disciples of all nations, and what better place is there to do that than the locker room? Here, there are men from all walks of life whose ears are just itching for God's Word! When you're walking in Christ and seeking Him first, your teammates will notice that something's different about you; they'll start to ask you about the choices you make. The best way to serve those around you is to show them the love of Christ by the way you live your life. I wouldn't be serving my teammates if I kept the gift of Christ's salvation from them.

JOSH McCOWN

The heart of serving begins when you believe so much in what you've surrendered to that you are willing to give up yourself to make sure others have that too. Jesus came so that we would know the Father. If we are going to be a ransom for people, we need to be willing to say, "Whatever it takes for you to have peace and a connection with God, I'll do that." If that means giving someone a smile, I'll do that. If it means giving of my time and resources, I'll do that. That small act of service might just be the thing that person needs to point them to know Jesus.

SUPER BOWL LI



MATTHEW
SLATER

AGAINST THE ODDS

There are many memorable Super Bowls, but Super Bowl LI in February 2017 was one for the ages. New England clawed back from a 25-point deficit – the largest comeback in the championship game’s history – at the only Super Bowl to ever go into overtime. The Patriots clipped the Falcons, 34-28.

Sports Spectrum caught up with Patriots’ wide receiver Matthew Slater a month after the game to hear about that nail-biter of a victory, and the cohesiveness of the team that pulled out the win.

Sport Spectrum: Near the end of the third quarter, analysts estimated that the Falcons had a 99.8 percent probability of winning. What do you think helped the Patriots to overcome those odds?

Slater: As I sit here, a month removed from the game, it’s still hard to believe what happened. I think about the latter half of that game, and getting to the fourth quarter. There’s something that we believed as a team all year, that we were family. When I think about family, families get tested and pushed to the limit. And we got pushed to the limit in that game, but one thing that we didn’t do was turn on one another. We stayed true to the belief that we had in one another, and thought, ‘Hey, we’re just going to keep competing, keep trying to make plays, and just see where it gets us.’

When things started to turn around, what were you thinking?

As I think back to that fourth quarter, and the rally that we were able to spark, it’s hard to remember, because there was so much energy, so much focus that we gave each and every play to try and get ourselves back in that football game. At one point you look up and realize, ‘We’ve got a chance. We’ve got a chance to maybe make this a game.’

Was there a point in particular where you did that?

For me, it was when we scored our 20th point (in the fourth quarter). We scored a touchdown, we got the two-point conversion, and you look up, it’s 20 to 28. We were only down by eight! We had been down 25 points, and now it’s only eight. The belief grew. As we looked into one another’s eyes, there was never a time of panic, and never a time of, ‘You need to do this, you need to do that.’

Everyone just looked internally and said, ‘I’m going to try and do my job the best that I can, and see where that gets us,’ and I think that belief really kicked in. So then we go in there and score our 26th point, and everybody’s excited in the crowd, but we know we still need to get this two-point conversion. So we convert the two-point conversion, and had just come down from being 25 points (behind). We had a lot of confidence; we really felt like we had a chance to win that game. The final whistle blew, and we went into overtime.

What were your thoughts going into overtime?

All of a sudden, regulation’s over, and it’s time for the coin toss. I don’t even go to Coach (Bill) Belichick. I usually go before the coin toss, and we talk about it. He had to call me over. I go off to the coin toss, still breathing hard, exhausted from having played for 60 minutes against a great, well-coached football team.

I call heads; that’s kind of the Slater thing. My dad did it, so throughout my whole career I’ve called heads. And I watched that coin leave the referee’s thumb and go in the air; I was tracking it the whole way. When I saw it was heads, I had a lot of confidence that we could finish the job. I believed in our team, and in what we’d been able to accomplish all year long. Everything that we had been through, from Week 1 on, to get to that point, I knew we were going to finish this thing.

Did the Super Bowl give you more opportunities to share your faith on camera?

For me, the Super Bowl presented a tremendous platform to be able to share the Gospel. I know going into that week, I had been praying for an opportunity to just let my light shine for Christ and make sure people knew that I believed that I was there solely because of Him. I had been able to do some interviews over the course of the week sharing my faith, and talked about the faith of some of the players on our team. A gentleman who I had visited with several times before has a prison ministry and was asking me several questions. And at one point he asked me if I could look into the camera and tell people what it means to be saved and how I understand salvation. And I jumped at the opportunity! To the best of my understanding, I shared the plan for salvation as the Bible outlines it. I’m so thankful for that opportunity.

As you reflect on that Super Bowl win, what was the best part?

We all know how it ended. The ending was definitely spectacular, but as I look back on it, it was about the journey, the things that we had to overcome. Dealing with Tom (Brady)’s suspension, dealing with some injuries to some key players. I’ve never been on a team that had more faith and belief in one another than this year’s team. I could not be more proud of the team that I’ve been a part of in my career. What a journey it was, 2016-17, and what great things we were able to accomplish.

SUPER BOWL
XXVI FLASHBACK
JAN. 26, 1992

REDSKINS ROMP BILLS IN MINNEAPOLIS METRODOME

BY JON ACKERMAN

Photo by Gin Ellis/Getty Images

The last time 1988 Super Bowl host Minneapolis hosted the big game — a typically chilly Minnesota day on Jan. 26, 1992 — its stadium was enjoying one of the greatest stretch runs in sports history. The Metrodome hosted arguably the three most popular American sporting events in a span of less than six months.

The fun began in late October 1991, as the Minnesota Twins captured the World Series by taking out the Atlanta Braves. The Twins won Game 7 on Oct. 27 by a score of 1-0, as a Gene Larkin single in the 10th inning sent the Metrodome into a frenzy.

One hundred and 62 days later, Duke dominated Michigan to claim its second straight NCAA basketball title. The Metrodome was home to the 1992 Final Four, and on April 6, Grant Hill, Christian Laettner and Bobby Hurley schooled the Fab Five, 71-51.

And in between those crowning moments, the Metrodome also hosted its first and only NFL title game. The Washington Redskins and Buffalo Bills met in Super Bowl XXVI.

Many anticipated a high-scoring shootout, as the teams ended the 1991 regular season as the highest scoring in the NFL — the Redskins averaged 30.3 points a game and the Bills 28.6. But that notion didn't account for Washington's elite defense, which ranked second in points allowed and third in yards allowed.

Neither offensive juggernaut could put anything on the board in the first quarter. But the Redskins found some rhythm in the second, following a field goal with two touchdowns. They led 17-0 at the half.

Things didn't improve for Buffalo after the break — and actually worsened in a hurry. On the first play of the second half, Bills QB Jim Kelly felt pressure up the middle and hurried a throw, which was picked off and returned to the Buffalo 2-yard line. Redskins RB Gerald Riggs scored on the next play, just 16 seconds into the third.

Buffalo responded with 10 points to make it 24-10, but another TD pass by Washington QB Mark Rypien before the quarter ended all but closed the door. Two more Redskins field goals in the fourth pushed the score to 37-10, before two late TD passes from Kelly set the final at 37-24.

The difference was the defense. Kelly was sacked five times, Rypien zero. In his Super Bowl-record 58 pass attempts, Kelly was also intercepted a Super Bowl-record four times; Rypien threw just one pick. Buffalo entered the game with the best rushing attack in the NFL behind league MVP Thurman Thomas, but he was bottled up for only 13 yards on 10 carries.

With 292 yards and two touchdowns on 18-of-33 passing, the 29-year-old Rypien was given Super Bowl MVP honors. A Canadian, he became the first foreign-born player to earn the award. And he helped Joe Gibbs become the first head coach to win a Super Bowl with three different QBs.

"We've had great ones in Joe Theismann and Doug Williams, and now Mark Rypien is a young one that has taken us there," Gibbs said after the game. "I feel very humble."

Gibbs also became just the third head coach to win three Super Bowls. This one in Minneapolis was his last. But despite all the accomplishments, the coach's career never defined him. Toward the end of his coaching days, he laid out his priorities:

"God is first. Family and loved ones are second, and then my occupation is third."

Words for us all to live by. *EW*



Photo by Focus on Sport/Getty Images



Photo by Focus on Sport/Getty Images

SUPER BOWL WINNERS

	DATE	LOCATION	FINAL SCORE	GAME MVP
I	Jan. 15, 1967	Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum	Green Bay 35, Kansas City 10	Bart Starr, QB, Green Bay
II	Jan. 14, 1968	Orange Bowl (Miami)	Green Bay 33, Oakland 14	Bart Starr, QB, Green Bay
III	Jan. 12, 1969	Orange Bowl (Miami)	New York Jets 16, Baltimore 7	Joe Namath, QB, New York
IV	Jan. 11, 1970	Tulane Stadium (New Orleans)	Kansas City 23, Minnesota 7	Len Dawson, QB, Kansas City
V	Jan. 17, 1971	Orange Bowl (Miami)	Baltimore 16, Dallas 13	Chuck Howley, LB, Dallas
VI	Jan. 16, 1972	Tulane Stadium (New Orleans)	Dallas 24, Miami 3	Roger Staubach, QB, Dallas
VII	Jan. 14, 1973	Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum	Miami 14, Washington 7	Jake Scott, S, Miami
VIII	Jan. 13, 1974	Rice Stadium (Houston)	Miami 24, Minnesota 7	Larry Csonka, FB, Miami
IX	Jan. 12, 1975	Tulane Stadium (New Orleans)	Pittsburgh 16, Minnesota 6	Franco Harris, RB, Pittsburgh
X	Jan. 18, 1976	Orange Bowl (Miami)	Pittsburgh 21, Dallas 17	Lynn Swann, WR, Pittsburgh
XI	Jan. 9, 1977	Rose Bowl (Pasadena, CA)	Oakland 32, Minnesota 14	Fred Biletnikoff, WR, Oakland
XII	Jan. 15, 1978	Superdome (New Orleans)	Dallas 27, Denver 10	Harvey Martin & Randy White, DL, Dallas
XIII	Jan. 21, 1979	Orange Bowl (Miami)	Pittsburgh 35, Dallas 31	Terry Bradshaw, QB, Pittsburgh
XIV	Jan. 20, 1980	Rose Bowl (Pasadena, CA)	Pittsburgh 31, Los Angeles 19	Terry Bradshaw, QB, Pittsburgh
XV	Jan. 25, 1981	Superdome (New Orleans)	Oakland 27, Philadelphia 10	Jim Plunkett, QB, Oakland
XVI	Jan. 24, 1982	Silverdome (Pontiac, MI)	San Francisco 26, Cincinnati 21	Joe Montana, QB, San Francisco
XVII	Jan. 30, 1983	Rose Bowl (Pasadena, CA)	Washington 27, Miami 17	John Riggins, RB, Washington
XVIII	Jan. 22, 1984	Tampa (Fla.) Stadium	Los Angeles 38, Washington 9	Marcus Allen, RB, Los Angeles
XIX	Jan. 20, 1985	Stanford (Calif.) Stadium	San Francisco 38, Miami 16	Joe Montana, QB, San Francisco
XX	Jan. 26, 1986	Superdome (New Orleans)	Chicago 46, New England 10	Richard Dent, DE, Chicago
XXI	Jan. 25, 1987	Rose Bowl (Pasadena, Calif.)	New York Giants 39, Denver 20	Phil Simms, QB, New York
XXII	Jan. 31, 1988	Jack Murphy Stadium (San Diego)	Washington 42, Denver 10	Doug Williams, QB, Washington
XXIII	Jan. 22, 1989	Joe Robbie Stadium (Miami)	San Francisco 20, Cincinnati 16	Jerry Rice, WR, San Francisco
XXIV	Jan. 28, 1990	Superdome (New Orleans)	San Francisco 55, Denver 10	Joe Montana, QB, San Francisco
XXV	Jan. 27, 1991	Tampa (FL) Stadium	New York Giants 20, Buffalo 19	Ottis Anderson, RB, New York
XXVI	Jan. 26, 1992	Metrodome (Minneapolis)	Washington 37, Buffalo 24	Mark Rypien, QB, Washington
XXVII	Jan. 31, 1993	Rose Bowl (Pasadena, Calif.)	Dallas 52, Buffalo 17	Troy Aikman, QB, Dallas
XXVIII	Jan. 30, 1994	Georgia Dome (Atlanta)	Dallas 30, Buffalo 13	Emmitt Smith, RB, Dallas
XXIX	Jan. 29, 1995	Joe Robbie Stadium (Miami)	San Francisco 49, San Diego 26	Steve Young, QB, San Francisco
XXX	Jan. 28, 1996	Sun Devil Stadium (Tempe, AZ)	Dallas 27, Pittsburgh 17	Larry Brown, CB, Dallas
XXXI	Jan. 26, 1997	Superdome (New Orleans)	Green Bay 35, New England 21	Desmond Howard, KR, Green Bay
XXXII	Jan. 25, 1998	Qualcomm Stadium (San Diego)	Denver 31, Green Bay 24	Terrell Davis, RB, Denver
XXXIII	Jan. 31, 1999	Pro Player Stadium (Miami)	Denver 34, Atlanta 19	John Elway, QB, Denver
XXXIV	Jan. 30, 2000	Georgia Dome (Atlanta)	St. Louis 23, Tennessee 16	Kurt Warner, QB, St. Louis
XXXV	Jan. 28, 2001	Raymond James Stadium (Tampa, FL)	Baltimore 34, New York Giants 7	Ray Lewis, LB, Baltimore
XXXVI	Feb. 3, 2002	Superdome (New Orleans)	New England 20, St. Louis 17	Tom Brady, QB, New England
XXXVII	Jan. 26, 2003	Qualcomm Stadium (San Diego)	Tampa Bay 48, Oakland 21	Dexter Jackson, CB, Tampa Bay
XXXVIII	Feb. 1, 2004	Reliant Stadium (Houston)	New England 32, Carolina 29	Tom Brady, QB, New England
XXXIX	Feb. 6, 2005	Alltel Stadium (Jacksonville, FL)	New England 24, Philadelphia 21	Deion Branch, WR, New England
XL	Feb. 5, 2006	Ford Field (Detroit)	Pittsburgh 21, Seattle 10	Hines Ward, WR, Pittsburgh
XLI	Feb. 4, 2007	Dolphin Stadium (Miami)	Indianapolis 29, Chicago 17	Peyton Manning, QB, Indianapolis
XLII	Feb. 3, 2008	University of Phoenix Stadium (AZ)	New York Giants 17, New England 14	Eli Manning, QB, New York
XLIII	Feb. 1, 2009	Raymond James Stadium (FL)	Pittsburgh 27, Arizona 23	Santonio Holmes, WR, Pittsburgh
XLIV	Feb. 7, 2010	Sun Life Stadium (Miami)	New Orleans 31, Indianapolis 17	Drew Brees, QB, New Orleans
XLV	Feb. 6, 2011	Cowboys Stadium (Arlington, TX)	Green Bay 31, Pittsburgh 25	Aaron Rodgers, QB, Green Bay
XLVI	Feb. 5, 2012	Lucas Oil Stadium (Indianapolis)	New York Giants 21, New England 17	Eli Manning, QB, New York
XLVII	Feb. 3, 2013	Mercedes-Benz Superdome (NO)	Baltimore 34, San Francisco 31	Joe Flacco, QB, Baltimore
XLVIII	Feb. 2, 2014	MetLife Stadium (East Rutherford, N.J.)	Seattle 43, Denver 8	Malcolm Smith, LB, Seattle
XLIX	Feb. 1, 2015	University of Phoenix Stadium (AZ.)	New England 28, Seattle 24	Tom Brady, QB, New England
50	Feb. 7, 2016	Levi's Stadium (Santa Clara, CA.)	Denver 24, Carolina 10	Von Miller, LB, Denver
LI	Feb. 5, 2017	NRG Stadium (Houston)	New England 34, Atlanta 28	Tom Brady, QB, New England



WINNERS



MOST SUPER BOWL WINS

- 6 - Steelers
- 5 - Patriots, Cowboys, 49ers



MOST SUPER BOWL APPEARANCES

- 9 - Patriots
- 8 - Steelers, Cowboys, Broncos



- 4 - Teams with zero appearances (Browns, Lions, Texans, Jaguars)

MOST SUPER BOWL WINS FOR STARTING QB

- 5 - Tom Brady



BY THE NUMBERS

MOST SUPER BOWL MVPs

- 4 - Tom Brady



MOST SUPER BOWL TOUCHDOWNS

- 15 - Tom Brady, passing
- 5 - Emmitt Smith, rushing
- 8 - Jerry Rice, receiving



MOST SUPER BOWL YARDS

- 2,071 - Tom Brady, passing
- 354 - Franco Harris, rushing
- 589 - Jerry Rice, receiving



MOST SUPER BOWL TACKLES

- 22 - Bobby Wagner



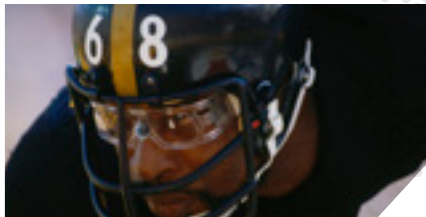
MOST SUPER BOWL INTERCEPTIONS

- 3 - Larry Brown, Rod Martin, Chuck Howley



MOST SUPER BOWL SACKS

- 5 - L.C. Greenwood



SUPER BOWL SINGLE-GAME RECORDS

466 MOST PASSING YARDS IN ONE GAME
Tom Brady (LI)

6 MOST PASSING TOUCHDOWNS IN ONE GAME
Steve Young (XXIX)

204 MOST RUSHING YARDS IN ONE GAME
Tommy Smith (XXII)

3 MOST RUSHING TOUCHDOWNS IN ONE GAME
Terrell Davis (XXXII)

25 MOST RECEIVING YARDS IN ONE GAME
Jerry Rice (XXIII)

3 MOST RECEIVING TOUCHDOWNS IN ON GAME
Jerry Rice (XXIX, XXIV)

6 Pulse Twin Cities 20

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May 18, 2018 || Minneapolis || Free Event

Featuring: Lecrae, Nick Hall, and more

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SUPER BOWL XXVI FLASHBACK

MINNESOTANS HIT THE STREETS FOR JESUS

by JON ACKERMAN

Dave Gibson awoke in the wee hours of a night this past November and couldn't stop thinking about the Super Bowl. He recalled 1992, the last time Minneapolis hosted the big game, and remembered the massive outreach effort that canvassed the Twin Cities with stories of sports and faith. He thought about the upcoming Super Bowl LII, which will be played at the shiny new U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis, and felt a similar urgency.

"We've got to capitalize on this for evangelistic purpose," he thought.

And so, the missions and evangelism pastor at Grace Church in Edina, Minn., reached out to Sports Spectrum Magazine, which was "really the centerpiece" of the movement in 1992. Gibson wanted to see if a similar effort could be launched.

Back in 1991 and '92, the Minneapolis-St. Paul area played host to a slew of major sporting events: Stanley Cup Finals, U.S. Open (golf), World Series, Final Four and Super Bowl XXVI. Anticipating the onslaught of sports fans to the area, Gibson created a temporary organization called Sports Outreach Minnesota, aiming to get the Gospel in front of as many of those fans as possible.

"We had all of those events going on, so I started thinking, 'Man, we need some evangelism tools that are sports related, that are impactful and that aren't cheesy tracts that people are going to chuck on the sidewalk,'" he thought.

For the Super Bowl, more than 300 churches and ministries mobilized thousands of people to distribute 250,000 special Super Bowl editions of Sports Spectrum, each one with a response card inside for readers to fill out. The organizations also teamed with local sports personalities to produce a video to be shown at halftime parties all across the country. And they brought in pro athletes and professional speakers for 150 high school assemblies around Minnesota, reaching 106,000 students.



the very first Sports Spectrum Super Bowl edition



"We had over 22,000 responses to the Gospel and other types of commitments," Gibson says. "It was just amazing ... I was getting [response cards] from prisons in Russia. They were coming from all over the world and just kept coming in even a year — even beyond that — after the event."

This magazine you hold in your hands is a product of the same outreach effort, just 26 years later. Churches and ministries from across the Twin Cities — including PULSE Twin Cities, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Athletes In Action and Young Life — joined together again to "really saturate the Twin Cities with the Gospel of Jesus," as Gibson says.

On Jan. 1, these groups launched, "33 Days of Prayer" for all the people flooding into the Twin Cities, and 10 days before the Super Bowl they began 24/7 prayer. This time, 200,000 magazines were printed, along with 300,000 flyers, totaling half a million pieces used as tools to talk about the Gospel.

And once again, Gibson, who it seems has always had sports ministry in his blood, spearheaded the effort.

"There's just a lot of evangelical cooperation here in the Twin Cities that I've been a part of for quite a few years," he says.

This outreach model began in Minneapolis 26 years ago. Now, the hope is for it to be replicated year after year by every Super Bowl host city. 5



PRO BOWL PERSEVERANCE

ADAM THIELEN'S ROAD TO THE NFL WASN'T EASY, BUT HE'S NOW REAPING THE REWARDS OF HIS HARD WORK

by JON ACKERMAN

Back in Week 15, the night before a home game against the Bengals, Minnesota Vikings receiver Adam Thielen was chosen to lead the team's chapel service in prayer. He did so without hesitation, simply sharing what God had put on his heart.

"It's never been necessarily the most comfortable thing for me because in some of those situations you're like, 'Oh man, am I really a good enough man of God to lead these guys in prayer?'" Thielen says. "But I think it's something that God is testing me in, and [He's] pushing me to be more outspoken [about] the Lord, to be able to handle those moments."

He admits that in the past he

would have been more nervous. But in his current season of life, the 27-year-old Thielen has never been more comfortable with how he fits into this team, or with himself. He's enjoyed a Hollywood-worthy ascension to stardom in the NFL — from a Northern Minnesota high school, to Division II Minnesota State, to the Minnesota Vikings practice squad, to his first Pro Bowl this season — and he's loving life off the field with a devoted wife and

adorable 1-year-old son. Caitlin and Asher drive Adam to grow in his game and his walk with Jesus.

The journey to arrive here, however, wasn't as easy as, say, a stroll around Lake Calhoun. No one expected Thielen to make it to the NFL, let alone the Pro Bowl. But faith in himself, trust in the Lord and thousands of hours of hard work have molded Thielen into one of Minnesota's greatest athletes.



"THROUGHOUT MY CAREER THAT'S HOW IT'S HAPPENED – YOU MAKE A PLAY, THE NEXT WEEK YOU GET MORE OPPORTUNITIES; YOU MAKE MORE PLAYS, YOU GET MORE OPPORTUNITIES THAT FOLLOWING WEEK."

– ADAM THIELEN

His tale is the stuff of Minnesota legend. A four-sport star at Detroit Lakes High School (200 miles northwest of Minneapolis), Thielen felt he could go on to play college ball, either basketball or football. But most colleges didn't feel the same way. His only scholarship offer came from Minnesota State University in Mankato (80 miles southwest of Minneapolis), and totaled only \$500 for football.

Deemed too small to play as a freshman, Thielen was given a redshirt and ordered to pack on some pounds. Four years later he became the squad's best receiver and a first-team all-conference selection. But that wasn't good enough for an NFL Combine invite.

Instead, he paid \$200 to participate in a regional combine in Chicago. A strong showing there got him a spot at a super regional combine in Dallas. When he clocked a 4.45-second time in the 40-yard dash, heads turned. That earned him a tryout at a Vikings rookie minicamp.

Thielen's speed and hands opened

more eyes with the Vikings, who soon invited him to training camp ahead of the 2013 season. He got cut at the end of the preseason, but signed the next day to the practice squad, where he remained the rest of the season.

His NFL debut came in Week 1 of 2014, his first catch in Week 5, and his first touchdown in Week 13, when he blocked a punt and scooped up the loose ball for a score. The year ended with him on the All-Pro team as a special teams stud.

Thielen was named the Vikings' Special Teams Player of the Year in 2015, when he also saw a bit more action at receiver. His role expanded exponentially in 2016, as he started 10 games and caught 69 balls for 967 yards and five touchdowns. The numbers all rose again in 2017, with 83 catches and 1,191 yards through 14 games (after which this magazine went to print).

What was the key to the career year? Thielen says it was the entire team having success and guys around him

making plays. But also, "just having the opportunity to be on the field pretty much every snap of every game."

"Going back to early in my career, I knew that when you do get an opportunity, you really have to make the most of it because that's your chance to get more opportunity in the future," Thielen says. "Throughout my career that's how it's happened — you make a play, the next week you get more opportunities; you make more plays, you get more opportunities that following week. So I just continue to try to get better and continue to try to make sure that when there is an opportunity, I'm ready to make a play."

Along for the ride has been Caitlin, whom Thielen met in college. He had recently started attending his football team's Bible studies and knew she was strong in her faith. "One of my first ways of trying to get her to go on a date with me was [saying], 'Let's go to church sometime.'"

Raised in the Catholic church, Thielen attended a Catholic elementary school and was a regular at Wednesday and Sunday mass. He always believed in God and tried to be the best person he could be, but says he started questioning things in college.



Photo by Dylan Buell/Getty Images

**“THERE’S A REASON WHY HE PUT MY WIFE
IN MY LIFE. SHE’S BEEN MY ROCK, SHE’S
BEEN MY BIGGEST SUPPORTER. I REALLY
DON’T KNOW WHAT I’D DO WITHOUT HER.”**
– ADAM THIELEN

“I didn’t really know where my faith was at. I just kind of tried to be a good person, but I wasn’t necessarily being the best man of God. A couple years into college I just kind of had a moment. I was like, ‘I need to make a change. There’s something missing in my life.’ And that was when I started to go to the team Bible study,” he says.

Meeting Caitlin and attending church with her helped push Thielen in the right direction. She began holding him accountable, something she still does to this day.

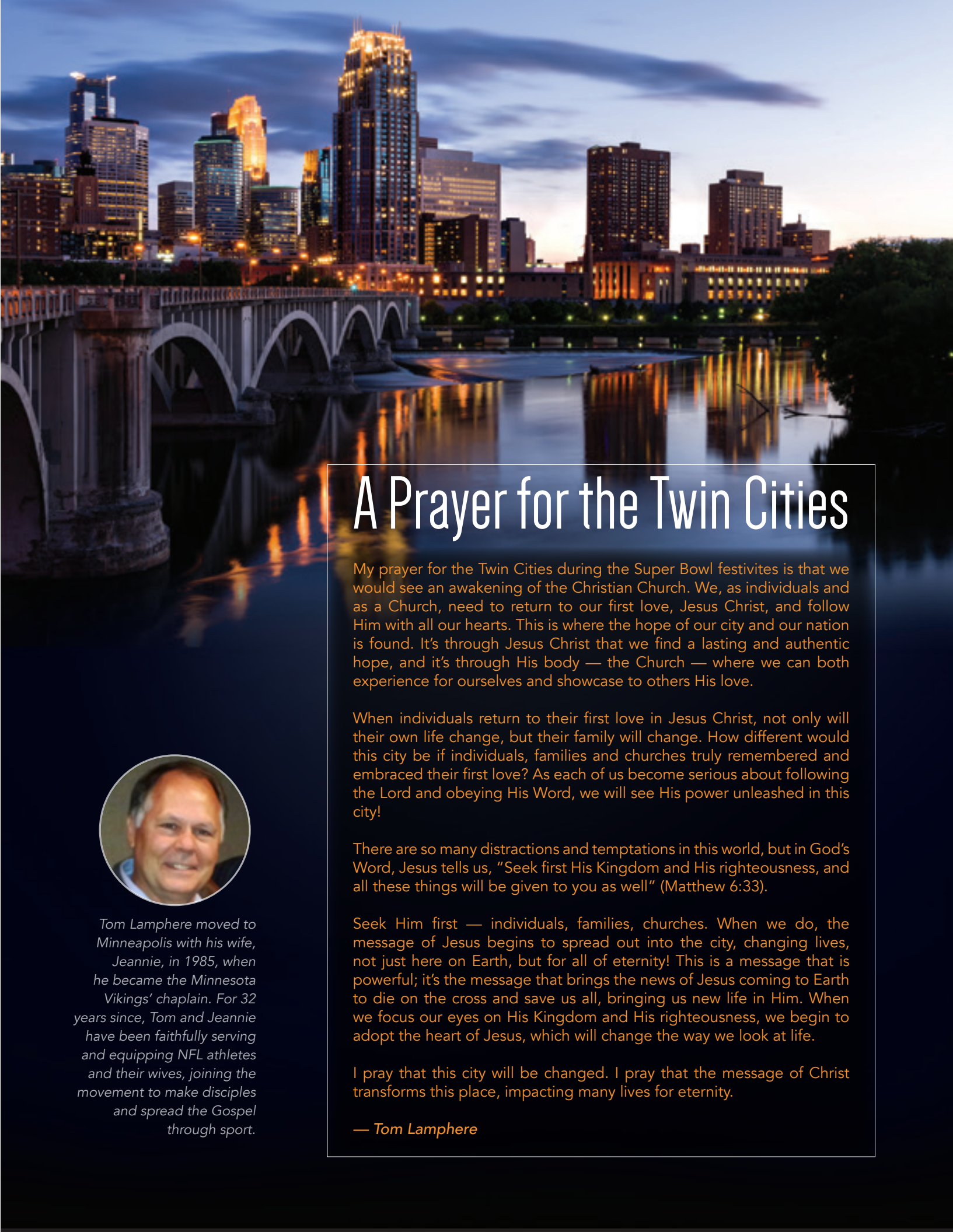
“There’s a reason why He put my wife in my life,” Thielen says. “She’s been my rock, she’s been my biggest supporter. I really don’t know what I’d do without her just because of all she does for our family,

not just for me. And in my walk with faith. He’s put her in my life for a reason and I’m very thankful for that.”

The biggest lesson Thielen’s learned from his walk with God has been taking life one day at a time. He simply focuses on being the best man of God, husband, father and football player for that day. He doesn’t look too far ahead.

“When I look back at my journey and how I’ve gotten to where I am,” Thielen says, “I feel that if I would have looked too far ahead and thought about too much in the future, I probably wouldn’t be where I am today.”

“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” — Matthew 6:34



A Prayer for the Twin Cities

My prayer for the Twin Cities during the Super Bowl festivities is that we would see an awakening of the Christian Church. We, as individuals and as a Church, need to return to our first love, Jesus Christ, and follow Him with all our hearts. This is where the hope of our city and our nation is found. It’s through Jesus Christ that we find a lasting and authentic hope, and it’s through His body — the Church — where we can both experience for ourselves and showcase to others His love.

When individuals return to their first love in Jesus Christ, not only will their own life change, but their family will change. How different would this city be if individuals, families and churches truly remembered and embraced their first love? As each of us become serious about following the Lord and obeying His Word, we will see His power unleashed in this city!

There are so many distractions and temptations in this world, but in God’s Word, Jesus tells us, “Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

Seek Him first — individuals, families, churches. When we do, the message of Jesus begins to spread out into the city, changing lives, not just here on Earth, but for all of eternity! This is a message that is powerful; it’s the message that brings the news of Jesus coming to Earth to die on the cross and save us all, bringing us new life in Him. When we focus our eyes on His Kingdom and His righteousness, we begin to adopt the heart of Jesus, which will change the way we look at life.

I pray that this city will be changed. I pray that the message of Christ transforms this place, impacting many lives for eternity.

— Tom Lamphere



Tom Lamphere moved to Minneapolis with his wife, Jeannie, in 1985, when he became the Minnesota Vikings’ chaplain. For 32 years since, Tom and Jeannie have been faithfully serving and equipping NFL athletes and their wives, joining the movement to make disciples and spread the Gospel through sport.



This is the only known photo of the first NFL postgame prayer huddle, taken on Dec. 3, 1990. However, it was shot just seconds before the huddle was complete. It shows only the six 49ers involved, not the two Giants who joined moments later.

Photo Courtesy of Pat Richie

THIS

PRAYER

How the
postgame
prayer huddle
at the **50**
came to be

by BECKY YORK & JON ACKERMAN

Pat Richie was in the shower when the trailblazing idea hit him. That's a place many great thoughts have come to mind, but few go on to have a culture-changing impact like this one. Fewer still are shared by a friend on the other side of the country at the same time.

Richie was the chaplain for the two-time defending Super Bowl champion San Francisco 49ers in 1990, when he was struck with the desire to use his platform to give glory to God. Looking ahead to his team's Dec. 3 Monday night matchup against the New York Giants, it appeared as if it could be a meeting of undefeated rivals. Richie thought that evening could be special.

"I saw this as a strategic game," he said, "and I thought, 'Is there a way to use this in a God-honoring way?'"

So he phoned his friend, Dave Bratton, the Giants' chaplain.

"Pat called me and he asked, 'What can we do to let people see that these players have a spiritual nature as well as physical and material?'" Bratton said. "My response was, 'We can pray together.'"

While Richie was on the West Coast, Bratton was on the East Coast also searching for an opportunity to bring faith into the spotlight that comes with football. They immediately collaborated on a way to make their dreams a reality.

Although both the 49ers and Giants lost their games the week before the big Monday nighter, anticipation for the meeting of NFC powerhouses still raged. While each team prepared for what was billed as an NFC championship game preview, each team chaplain worked out details for what would become one of the most enduring displays of faith to ever take place on a football field.

As the 98th season of the NFL comes to a close, a now-28-year-old tradition lives on. Immediately following nearly every game, every week, a postgame prayer commences.

Players from both teams, after spending the previous three hours in opposition, join hands to thank and honor our Heavenly Father.

The players could also thank Richie and Bratton, and some courageous players, for paving the way to see this expression of faith take place on a football field. It wasn't as simple as just dropping to a knee back in the 90s.



The idea of opponents coming together to pray was planted in Bratton's head by Giants tight end Howard Cross. "Howard shared with me about his college years, playing for Alabama when guys from both teams would come out before the game and pray together," Bratton says.

After the chaplains' initial conversation, which left them excited for their shared dream, each one approached some believers on their team. "I went and asked my players if they would want to pray, and they said yes," Richie said. "I called Dave and he said 'Hey, my guys are up for this too!'"

It then became a matter of logistics. Wanting to take best advantage of the media coverage surrounding the game – it was expected to have the largest Monday night audience in NFL history up to that point, and it ultimately did – Richie and Bratton decided a postgame prayer would be most effective.

"Pat and I thought, 'People won't see it before the game,'" Bratton said. "There will be no people in the stadium yet and the cameras won't catch it. We'll need to do it after. But where are we gonna do it?'"

Richie suggested the 40-yard line, closest to the scoreboard in San Francisco's Candlestick Park. Bratton thought the 50-yard line would be more memorable and less confusing, but he agreed to the 40.

Though they played in separate divisions on opposite sides

of the country, the Niners-Giants rivalry had been growing for years. During the 1986 playoffs, the Giants throttled San Francisco, 49-3, the worst defeat in franchise history. New York sent 49ers QB Joe Montana to the hospital in the process. In 1988, the Giants missed the playoffs due to a tiebreaker after the 49ers lost their season finale. Some Giants accused the Niners of letting that game go so it would keep their rivals out of the postseason.

Thus, viewers were hoping for an intense battle the night of Dec. 3, 1990. They were not disappointed. Viewers hoping for a high-scoring affair, however, were. The game was extremely



"WHEN THE GAME WAS OVER, I WATCHED TO SEE IF ANYBODY WAS ACTUALLY GOING TO DO THIS [PRAYER]," RICHIE SAID. "I LOOKED OUT TO SEE THIS MASSIVE CROWD AT THE 40-YARD LINE. I COULDN'T BELIEVE HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE OUT THERE!"

"PEOPLE WON'T SEE IT BEFORE THE GAME," BRATTON SAID. "THERE WILL BE NO PEOPLE IN THE STADIUM YET AND THE CAMERAS WON'T CATCH IT. WE'LL NEED TO DO IT AFTER."

competitive and close, but the only scoring took place in the second quarter: a Matt Bahr field goal for the Giants, followed by a Montana TD pass to John Taylor for the Niners. San Francisco's 7-3 win was the lowest-scoring MNF game ever at that point.

“When the game was over, I watched to see if anybody was actually going to do this [prayer],” Richie said. “I looked out to see this massive crowd at the 40-yard line. I couldn’t believe how many people were out there!”

What he didn’t realize at first glance, though, was that the crowd had gathered for what almost became a brawl. Niners safety Ronnie Lott and Giants quarterback Phil Simms had exchanged words before the game, then during, and continued afterward. They had to be pulled apart by teammates right at midfield – just yards away from where a small group had formed to pray.

“I thought, ‘This isn’t gonna happen,’” Richie said. But sure enough, it did.

“The confrontation was being captured on news cameras at the 40, and then they panned over to see a few players on their knees, praying together,” Bratton said.

Initially the circle consisted only of San Francisco players: Brent Jones, Ron Lewis, Guy McIntyre, Bubba Paris,

The Giants found themselves facing the Bills again in Super Bowl XXV, which turned out to be one of the most memorable in history. During a particularly patriotic time in the U.S. due to the onset of the Persian Gulf War, the night began with Whitney Houston performing perhaps the greatest rendition ever of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” And after a tight, back-and-forth contest, the Giants emerged with a 20-19 victory following kicker Scott Norwood’s “wide right” miss on a 47-yard game-winning attempt.

Amidst the drama, Giants and Bills players convened one last time that season on the 50 for a postgame prayer huddle.

But not everyone was thrilled about the players’ public display of faith. Just weeks after the Super Bowl, *Sports Illustrated* columnist Rick Reilly ripped the Giants for praying, comparing postgame huddles and sideline prayers with German Nazis displaying badges reading, “God is with us.”

Then in March, the NFL imposed a non-fraternization rule. Players on opposing teams were not allowed to hug or shake the hand of another player after the game. Such an act could result in fines up to \$25,000 for those involved.

“We knew this was targeted at the postgame prayer,”

room, then again towards the huddle,” Richie recalled. “...He went over to pray.”

A group of five Giants (Cross, Thompson, Zeke Mowatt, William Roberts, John Washington) and one 49er (Wallace) gathered at the 50, brothers in Christ locking arms in the face of the NFL fraternization rule. The players were watched closely as their desire to live out their faith outweighed the threat of a fine – especially after ABC’s announcers pointed them out.

“By the way, gentlemen, that little grouping we’re getting there at midfield, this was supposed to be taboo this year. A prayer,” Dan Dierdorf said on air.

“I’d hate to be the guy to say that’s taboo,”

Frank Gifford said.

“Really, really,” Dierdorf said in agreement.

“I walked up to Steve afterwards and I said, ‘Steve, I’m really proud of you.’ He put his arm around me, looked at me with a smile and said, ‘If they fine me, you’re in big trouble,’” Richie said.

Neither the players nor chaplains knew what would be the result of their stand against the non-fraternization rule, but they acted in faith. Faith-based organizations and ministries contacted Richie in support, offering to defend

The postgame prayer is so ingrained in the culture of the NFL now that players just know to head to the 50-yard line. And the rookies learn. Benjamin Watson, a tight end for the Baltimore Ravens, said he just followed the veterans when he came into the league. Now, he’s among those leading the prayer.

“It’s either a chaplain from the home team or a player from the home team that usually leads the prayer,” Watson recently told Jason Romano on the Sports Spectrum Podcast. “Sometimes you have five guys, sometimes you have up to 25 guys that are kneeling, holding hands, embracing and just praying and thanking the Lord for the opportunity to play this game, for the platform that we have. Praying for our families while we’re away from them, praying for safe travels for the visiting team



going back, praying for those who have been injured, lifting each other up for the rest of the season and encouraging each other. Simply displaying that although we work for different teams, we play for different teams and have different uniforms on, we are one family when it comes to our beliefs and being part of God’s family.”

That all started with a calling put on the hearts of two people, whom God positioned to be instrumental in the lives of NFL players. As they answered that call, God went to work.

“The prayer huddle has nothing to do with wins and losses,” Bratton said. “It is about players expressing their thanks to God for their ability to play the game. It’s a time of worship where opponents gather and acknowledge their brotherhood and common faith in Jesus Christ.”

“Who will not fear You, Lord, and bring glory to Your name? For You alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed.” – Psalm 115:1



“ALTHOUGH WE PLAY FOR DIFFERENT TEAMS AND HAVE DIFFERENT UNIFORMS ON, WE ARE ONE FAMILY WHEN IT COMES TO OUR BELIEFS AND BEING PART OF GOD’S FAMILY,” WATSON SAID.

Steve Wallace and Dave Waymer. “But within 10 seconds, two of the Giants players (Cross and Reyna Thompson) ran over and joined the prayer huddle. That was the first time the postgame prayer huddle ever happened,” Richie said.

Bratton will never forget the phone call he received a couple days later. Watson Spoelstra, the founder of Baseball Chapel, saw the huddle on TV and told him, “That’s the coolest thing that could ever happen in pro sports.”

“In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” – Ephesians 1:11

Despite the loss and chaos that surrounded them during the postgame prayer circle, Giants players huddled to honor God the next week too, and the next, and after nearly every week the rest of the season. Bratton would contact the opposing teams’ chaplains with the same proposal to pray. Week after week, the chaplains found players who agreed to gather in prayer with their opponents after competing.

“We only missed one game that year since we started,” Bratton said, “and that was against Buffalo, on December 15th. Afterwards, I looked at the team and we thought, ‘We may get a chance to rectify that.’ Sure enough, that’s what happened.”

Richie said. “I thought to myself, ‘With all the problems in the NFL, if they fine these guys for praying after the game, they’re nuts!’”

As the 1991 season approached, many wondered if the postgame prayer would resurface in light of the NFL’s apparent opposition. But wouldn’t you know who opened the season against each other? The Giants and 49ers, again on Monday Night Football. On Sept. 2, the rivals played another close, competitive game, with the Giants taking this one, 16-14.

“After the game ... I looked over and saw Steve Wallace (offensive lineman for the 49ers), who started to walk towards the locker room, then he zigged toward the huddle, and then zagged toward the locker



MONDAY

No matter what they're doing, most people I meet generally want to do their very best. They usually want to excel in their chosen field, and they're willing to put in the hard work necessary for that to take place.

But there's a line — a line that's thin and blurry — that we can so easily cross. With just one false move, belief or agreement, we step over the line that separates being *excellent* and being *perfect*.

It's easy to believe that perfectionism is a good thing. Jesus even seems to command it in the Sermon on the Mount when He tells says to "be perfect" (Matthew 5:48), but is that really what Jesus is saying? Is He really telling His followers to be perfectionists?

My story is the story of someone who might not ever *call* himself a perfectionist, but who was living as one. I was so scared of letting people down — my family, the owners and coaches of my NFL teams, and the fans. And to be honest, that perfectionism carried over into my relationship with God. I felt like if I didn't achieve something that was perfect, then I was letting God down. And that's a terrible place to live.

We know that perfectionism has very little lasting value, but it's so difficult to honestly believe that, and to allow that belief to influence our actions.

"Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!?' These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence." — Colossians 2:20-23

In these verses, Paul talks about how holding ourselves to a standard of perfection has the appearance of wisdom, but in the end only leads us down a path of further self-indulgence.

Football injuries were God's way of leading me away from a life of perfectionism, and into a life of grace. But those injuries weren't the only thing that helped me experience God's grace.

So at the end of the day, we need to be excellent in everything we do. But when things don't go as we've planned, we must take comfort in the fact that God is still acting in our lives, and that His posture toward us is still one that is loving and inviting. We are people who have been given the righteousness of Jesus, and that's a gift we could never earn on our own. He *already* loves us that much!

— Benjamin Watson, Baltimore Ravens tight end



Written by Len Vanden Bos

TUESDAY

THERE HE STANDS

[OPEN WITH] John 21:1-14

In the last chapter of the Gospels, John describes a final encounter with Jesus by the Sea of Galilee, which includes one last miracle and a crucial conversation in which marching orders are issued. It starts with Jesus standing on the shore.

In John 21:3, Peter says "I'm going out to fish," and Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two others follow him. After a night on the water and an empty net, they head back to find Jesus looking out at them.

Imagine what Jesus was feeling as He watched these men in the boat. They spent three years together. He invested so much time, teaching and emotion in them. They followed, failed, and at times, struggled to understand what Jesus was doing. Yet, they were His disciples — His friends. And here He was, showing up for them again.

Psalms 103 describes God as "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love." He looks at you as a loving father looks at His child. Knowing how God views you sets the foundation of your relationship with Him. God's not angry or distant, He is for you. You are chosen and loved!

Jesus stands on the shore. He wants to lead you, longs to be with you, and sees you as His treasured child. Be still, feel His presence, and know His love for you today.

WEDNESDAY

FEED MY SHEEP

John 21:17

After a miraculous catch of fish and breakfast with the disciples, Jesus and Peter take a walk. The conversation to follow is one of the most powerful in all of Scripture. It's only been 40 days since Peter denied Jesus; the sting of his failure is still fresh. Jesus questions Peter's love for Him three times. All three times, Peter affirms his love, countering the three denials just weeks before.

With each declaration, Jesus refocuses Peter on the task at hand: "Feed My sheep." This dialogue is deliberate and rich in meaning. God has a job for Peter to do, and his failure doesn't disqualify him. Peter must release his shame and move forward.

When they first met Jesus, the disciples were called to be "fishers of men." They are reminded of this again in Matthew

9 when Jesus refers to the crowds as "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd...the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." There's no shortage of lost people, the shortage is of workers.

God's greatest desire is to seek and save the lost. This truth is confirmed through Christ's interactions and teachings, and is driven home in this final conversation with Peter. God not only restores you, but invites you to play a part in His redemptive work.

You take part in God's redemptive plan every time you share His love. Ask God to open your eyes today to ways you can answer the call: "Feed My sheep."

THURSDAY

THE COMPARISON GAME

John 21:21

As he walked and talked with Jesus, Peter was changing. He was forgiven and had a renewed sense of purpose. He was "the rock" again, ready to build the Church. But Jesus had one final lesson.

As they walked, Peter noticed that John, "the disciple that Jesus loved," was following them. In verse 21, Peter asked, "Lord, what about him?" It seems like an innocent question, but Jesus knew his heart; it revealed a deeper issue.

Peter was a competitor. He was bold, outspoken and the clear leader of the movement. No doubt he took great pride in the fact that he was a key player in God's plan, but he wasn't without weaknesses. His struggle with pride was one of them.

John was not Peter's concern. Jesus made that clear when He said, "What is that to you? You must follow Me." In other words, "Don't get distracted. This is about you and Me." It's so easy to fall into the temptation of comparison. We obsess over what we don't have and find ways to feel superior to others. This tendency to compare and compete with others can keep us from experiencing true community.

God intentionally formed you as one of a kind. God incorporates both your gifts and struggles into the unique mission He has for you. To carry out this mission, you must fix your eyes on Him, not on others around you. Get to know Jesus better each day, and focus on the next step He has for you.

FRIDAY

WHAT'S NEXT?

Romans 8:15

The next time we read about Peter is in the book of Acts. He is healing a crippled beggar and boldly preaching at Pentecost. He and John are side by side, taking on the religious leaders of the day with confidence and courage. Acts 4:13 tells us, "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus."

They had indeed been with Jesus. Their relationship with Christ served as the foundation for their convictions. They knew who they were and were fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit. It would be an incredibly hard journey, but ultimately so fulfilling to live out their calling.

"This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike, 'What's next, Papa?'" — Romans 8:15 (MSG)

How do you greet God each day? The truth is that the same resurrection power that Peter and John experienced is available to you. You are His child and He is your good, good Father. He loves hearing you ask, "What's next, Papa?"

May you live with great expectancy as you reach up and take His hand today, trusting in what He has for you in each moment.

WEEKEND

...CONTINUE READING ABOUT

FAITHFULNESS OF JESUS:

Psalms 103 & Luke 15;

Galatians 6:4-5 & Acts 1-4

Len Vanden Bos,
Buffalo Bills chaplain





Photo by Evan Habeeb/Getty Images

MONDAY

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." – Philippians 2:12

While Paul was with the church, things went really well. But when Paul left the church to continue his ministry elsewhere, things got even better! This is when the church members kicked it into high gear. My hope for us today is that we live as Christ-followers on our teams, in our homes, in our schools and in our churches.

I myself didn't begin a relationship with Christ until my junior year in college. My message to these kids is what I needed to hear when I was in their shoes: You are not saved just because your grandmother, your mom or your brother is a Christian. You have to make a choice to follow God for yourself.

"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." – Romans 10:9

Only then does our relationship with Christ begin! There's so much to learn and explore in God's Word about His character and ministry. Lately I've been studying the book of Jonah, which is quickly turning into my favorite book of the Bible, because Jonah is just like you and me. It's easy to read his story and think, "Why would he not do what God is calling him to do?" But I can count numerous times when I walked away from what God called me to do in a given situation.

Then, when Jonah went to Nineveh to call a terrible people to repentance, he got ticked off when they did repent and God blessed them! I myself have watched people whose lives were filled with sin surrender their lives to Jesus, find new life in Him, and then be blessed by God. To which I couldn't help but wonder, "But why are the faithful still suffering?"

This book is a great reminder that I have no control over situations. Jonah's is an extreme story – so full of real life struggle, failure, triumph and hope. It confirms for me that God is willing to give us second, third and fourth chances to repent and come back to Him.

Who am I to ever think I've sinned too much to be worthy of salvation by God? Like there's an end to God's grace? I'll never be worthy, but Christ became righteousness for me! Jonah's story, my story, and all of our stories give us the opportunity to share the truth that it doesn't matter what a person has done or hasn't done, we can never sin so much that God stops forgiving us.

This truth doesn't give us permission to continue sinning, but rather calls us to do everything we can to be like Christ. He is our boast and our confidence. We will not be perfect, but He is.

— Trey Burton, Philadelphia Eagles tight end

Written by Don Davis

TUESDAY

ARE YOU LISTENING?

[OPEN WITH] Jonah 1:1-2

"Boy, are you listening to me?" As a child, I often heard these words from my mother's lips. I can vividly remember her calling me while I was deeply engrossed in whatever activity had my attention at the time. Most of the time, I heard what she said, but my attention was focused elsewhere. Other times, I was simply being disobedient.

The book of Jonah opens with the Lord giving clear instructions to Jonah. I want to give Jonah the benefit of the doubt and assume he heard what the Lord said, but his attention was simply focused elsewhere. Jonah says, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord the God of Heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (verse 9). If that is the case, then why did he neglect to do what the Lord asked?

There have been times in my life I have heard a clear word from the Lord and chosen to do something different. The Apostle Paul encourages us to be more like Christ, particularly when it comes to being obedient. Paul describes Jesus as being, "Obedient to death, even death on the cross" (Philippians 2:8).

Is the Lord telling you something, but your attention is somewhere else? Has the Lord told you to do something, but you refused to obey? My prayer today is that we will not only hear His voice, but follow His example and learn to become obedient.

WEDNESDAY

WHAT ARE YOU RUNNING FROM?

Jonah 1:3

Jonah heard a word from the Lord and immediately took off running. I can identify with this feeling. Church wasn't an option in my parent's house. My mother used to say, "Whenever the doors of the church are open, we will be there." She did not disappoint.

I remember trying to find any excuse to not attend service. Even though I grew up in the Church and was baptized at the age of 11, I basically ran from the Lord for 20 years. All I wanted was hell insurance; I was not at all interested in being a good Christian.

All of that changed shortly after meeting Coach Tony Dungy. He was a man of integrity. I could tell there was something different about him. His life shined so bright that it caused me to recommit mine to the Lord.

The Apostle Paul said, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ ... Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do" (Philippians 1:27; 3:17)

Those are intimidating words, but with the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be examples for those who are running from the Lord's calling just as I once was. My prayer is that we will live in such a way that others will take notice. I pray that our integrity will cause others to stop running from God and begin to run toward Him.

THURSDAY

WHAT'S YOUR MOTIVE?

Jonah 4:3 & Philippians 1:21, 24

Jonah and Paul are saying the same thing in these two passages of Scripture. Both men ask the Lord to die, but each has a different reason for making such a request. Jonah is selfish. He is having a pity party because God offers mercy to people whom he doesn't feel are worthy. Paul, on the other hand, is having a praise party, because even though he's in jail, he's confident his suffering is for the advancement of the Gospel.

As I contrast the prayers of these two men, I am convicted by the number of times I too have prayed selfishly. "God, bless me. God, help me. God provide an answer for me. God help them, because their life is affecting me." Sometimes we get so focused on ourselves that we neglect to rejoice over what God is doing in the life of someone else. There have even been times the spirit of jealousy has attempted to enter into my heart because God hasn't answered a prayer of mine, and yet I see breakthroughs happening in the lives of those around me.

My prayer today is that we would learn to rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). This is the attitude Paul had as he prayed for himself in the midst of his difficulty. He chose not to make it about him so that he could focus on those around him.

FRIDAY

LEARN THE SECRET

Jonah 4

The book of Jonah closes with the ultimate cliffhanger. We leave Jonah sitting under a tree, mad that God has given grace to a people whom he didn't feel were deserving. God then uses a plant as a visual example to teach Jonah a lesson about compassion. But when the book comes to an end, there is no mention as to whether Jonah learns anything from the Lord.

The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, ends the book of Philippians by telling us what he's learned.

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength." — (Philippians 4:12-13)

During my NFL career, I was able to experience the joy of winning the Super Bowl twice, but I experienced the agony of defeat that comes with losing the Super Bowl as well. I've also experienced many highs and lows outside the game of football. We all go through pain and pleasure, heartbreak and happiness. But Paul gives us the secret for every situation: Trust in the Lord.

My prayer is that no matter what you are going through, you will praise Him for the little things, which are easy to take for granted. I pray you will enjoy the view from the mountaintop, and press on while in the valley. Both can be a gift from God.

WEEKEND

...CONTINUE READING ABOUT HOW TO KEEP YOUR EYES ON CHRIST:

Romans 1-3 & Philippians 1:29;
Romans 4-5 & Hebrews 12:2

Don Davis,
Director of football ministry at
Pro Athletes Outreach





MONDAY

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of it." – John 17:16

In our culture today, many people are trying to take Jesus out of the picture, not only in sports, but also in music, schools, television and other media outlets. It's absolutely critical that we keep Him in.

Jesus is the ultimate reason I do what I do. He's blessed me with the talent to play in the NFL, a family of my own, a scholarship to get the education and athletic training I did, and so much more. How I live my life is my gift back to God, who gave me the gift of life! The NFL is one of the greatest platforms I could be given to share my faith. I'd be doing my Creator, myself and others a disservice if I didn't bring Jesus into everything I do.

Every photo I post on Instagram or Twitter has a Bible verse with it because that's one more way I can put Jesus' name out there. Instagram is too often all about ourselves – how we look, what we're doing and who we're with. It's such a shame! We're taking something that can be used for good and perverting it into something selfish. Jesus is the One we should be focusing on. If everyone's getting all their information from social media, you better believe that's where I'll post the truth of God's message.

Whenever you take a stand for your faith, you will experience pushback – especially on social media. People think since they are untouchable, that they can say anything they want. Yes, everyone's free to have an opinion, but not to cyber bully. There have been many times when I've posted a verse on social media to which others will reply, "Stick to football man," or "I can't believe you believe this fake story." But these comments never discourage me. In fact, Jesus promised we would experience adversity as believers.

"Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed My teaching, they will obey yours also." — John 15:20.

It's easy to love someone who is lovable, but when you're able to love someone who is hateful, envious or jealous, that's when you know you have Christ's love in you. That's what He did for us.

Recently in our Bible study, we talked about how we all need God to be our Shepherd. A lot of times we try to be our own shepherd, but we just can't. Our problems are too big for us. We have to have faith in the God who spoke the world into existence and breathed life into us. If He's that big, He's bigger than any problem we may face. We just have to trust and believe in Him.

This is the Jesus I want others to know. He's worth talking about. He's worth living for. Jesus is my everything.

— Matt Forte, New York Jets running back



Written by Jack Easterby

TUESDAY

THE WORD = OUR INSTRUCTION

[OPEN WITH] Psalm 119:105

Stay close to God's Word, always supported by His sovereign teaching. The Bible is a 66-book love letter written to us by the Almighty God Himself. How well we operate in this life is directly related to how close we draw near to our Creator and how much we soak in His instruction through His Word. The pages of Scripture contain everything we need for life. When we read it, it will change who we are from the inside out.

Sports offer a lot of challenges for us physically and mentally. The Bible, however, prepares us for all of life's challenges. God's Word is the ultimate game plan for life, containing strategies, examples, instructions, warnings and everything else we need to be victorious in our journey of following Christ.

As Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (ESV).

Isn't that we want, to be equipped for every good work? That seems like a daunting task, but it's exactly what we're promised when we dive into God's Word. Trying to honor God without knowing what God desires of us is a tough proposition, but when we enter into the knowledge He's given to us, we can accurately aim toward the goal to which we're called.

WEDNESDAY

THE CHURCH = OUR TEAM

1 Corinthians 12:12

God works through His Church – "Christ-followers" – to reveal to the world who He is. Many times, sports can take us away from the church services we love and cherish so much. However, to stay charged in our faith and honor God on the playing field, we MUST have a church home.

It's also crucial we have a healthy understanding of what the Church is. The Church needs believers of all kinds, including athletes. The truth is, athletes benefit from the Church as much as the Church benefits from athletes. The Church is not a bunch of perfect people. Instead, it's a bunch

of imperfect people relying on a perfect God, who made a way for the rest of us to see the world perfectly through His Son, Jesus Christ. When we neglect to be part of a Church because our schedules are too busy, we can become dry in our faith.

Remember, life is not just about what's next on our schedule. It's about WHO IS FIRST IN OUR LIVES! We must always ask ourselves, "How can I honor Jesus in this interaction right here, right now?"

The Church serves as God's ultimate facilitator for how to handle life. When we fail to surround ourselves with Christian community, accountability, instruction and opportunities for service, we're not living life to the fullest.

Commit to the Church and let God's perfect love transform your life both personally and within community.

THURSDAY

THE WINDOW = OUR GAME

James 1:6

Sports are a blessing in so many ways. One of the most obvious lessons we learn through sports is that opportunities are not endless.

In every interaction we have, we must consider the window – the moment of time in which we have to interact with another person. In sports, we have small windows in which we can interact with our teammates and opponents to build relationships that might last a lifetime.

We also have small windows of opportunities to execute plays within our games that could make or break our athletic careers. These brief moments (ultimately acting as reflections of our lives) might be at-bats, brief plays on a court, or full seasons that seem like fleeting windows in which we must execute.

In each of these windows, God teaches us so much about obedience and impact. If we're obedient in the windows we're offered, we can make a pretty big impact. Our obedience to take action does not only result in success for ourselves, but can also result in fruitfulness for those who are competing alongside us.

In the same way, when we act in obedience to the call God has for us in our Christian walk, God's power will cause a massive impact. Not only will our own lives

be changed forever, but those we interact with along the way will also be impacted.

Don't pass up the open window God might have for you today.

FRIDAY

FEAR EXTINGUISHED BY FAITH = BELIEF

2 Timothy 1:7

Sometimes competition provokes fear. Will I get cut from the team? Will the coach yell at me? However, if you look up fear in the dictionary it will say it's "an emotion aroused by impending danger." But if that's really what fear is then, why do we fear things that aren't really impendingly dangerous? For example, we might fear what people think of us, financial security and gossip.

Great athletes must understand and retreat from fear. I define healthy fear as, "The emotion we give to someone who's qualified to master our thoughts, actions and destiny – God – which then turns into awe, the accurate fear of the Lord." The only thing worth fearing is the One who holds all things in the palm of His hand! But with fear of the Lord comes comfort in knowing of His great love for us.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?" — Psalm 27:1

Unhealthy fear is an emotion we get from someone or something that's unqualified to master our thoughts, actions and destiny, such as money, failure or a coach. A Christian athlete should walk into practice with a healthy fear and say, "I'm here to practice today, Coach. I'll give it all I've got."

Athletics truly teach us what healthy fear is (that which helps us play better) and what unhealthy fear is (that which paralyzes us).

WEEKEND

...CONTINUE READING ABOUT PUTTING YOUR FAITH IN GOD FIRST:
Exodus 14 & 2 Corinthians 5:1-10;
Exodus 15 & Romans 15

Jack Easterby,
New England Patriots chaplain





Through 13 games this 2017 season, Carson Wentz had tossed a league-leading 33 touchdowns, his Eagles owned the best record in the NFL and he was an MVP frontrunner. But in the third quarter of that 13th game on Dec. 10, he suffered a torn ACL that would end his incredible season. The next day, in a video he posted on social media, Wentz expressed sincere gratitude to his supportive fans and reaffirmed his faith in Christ in the midst of disappointment.

That same week, Wentz was scheduled to sit down for an interview to be featured in Football Sunday. But due to the operation he needed, he understandably wasn't able to make it. The video he posted, however, so clearly portrays his love and trust in Jesus that we wanted to share his message here:

What's up everybody? Obviously it's been a rough day for me personally; I'm not going to lie. I mean, I have a ton of faith in the Lord and in His plan, but at the end of the day it's still been a tough one. And it will be tough on me for a little bit. But as I reflect tonight, I just know the Lord is working through it. I know Jesus has a plan through it. I know He's trying to grow me in something, teach me something, use me somehow, some way. And this will just be a great testimony as I go forward.

You know, maybe not all of you out there are Christians or followers of Jesus, but I can say with 100 percent confidence as a follower of Jesus, I have the utmost confidence in His plan. His plan is perfect. If we got everything we wanted in life, it would be a disaster. I know Jesus is up there looking down and He

knows what He's doing. So I'm just going to surrender that to Him and trust Him in that.

But I can promise to everybody — all my fans out there in the Philly area and in the North Dakota area, all across this country — that this will not stop me. Going forward, I will come back stronger than ever. I will use this as motivation. And I will be attacking it, this whole process, as I recover.

But at the end of the day, this year we still have something special. We just clinched the NFC East. That was step one of our goals this season and we're just continuing on from there. And I will be with the team along the way. I will be supporting them. I have the utmost confidence in Nick [Foles] and the coaching staff and everybody else, that they'll step up. We've been plagued with injuries all year long, and it's just been

the "next man up" mentality. And that's just going to continue; that's just going to continue. Nick is going to do an amazing job and lead this team now. And I'm going to be there to support and help in whatever way I can.

Again, I just wanted to say "thank you." You know I tweeted out yesterday, "Thank you for all the thoughts and prayers." I genuinely mean that. The phone calls, the text messages, the emails, the tweets, everything from everybody out there, it just means the world to me. It's so humbling to know how many people are praying for me and lifting me up and encouraging me. It means the world. Again, I appreciate it. God bless all of you, and I promise this will not stop me and I will come back stronger than ever. ⚡



"I think it's really important for people to understand who God is, what He says about us, and what He says about our sin. You have to turn from your old ways, from your old self. It's not going to be perfect, but you have to turn and focus your eyes back on Him."
— Matthew Slater, New England Patriots

**YOU CAN
KNOW CHRIST
PERSONALLY**

OUR PROBLEM, GOD'S SOLUTION

By Randy Alcorn

1. "God created mankind in His own image ... God saw all that He had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:27, 31). God made human beings with personal and relational qualities like His own (Genesis 1:26). But something went terribly wrong.
2. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Our sins against a good and holy God have broken our relationship with Him (Isaiah 59:2).
3. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). When humankind chose to rebel against God, sin poisoned the world. People lost their relationship with God, and with it their happiness. But God loved us so much He sent us Jesus, fully God and fully man, to deliver us from death and give us life (John 3:16).
4. "God demonstrates His own love toward us ... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus went to the cross to pay the price for our sins. He rose from the grave, conquering sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
5. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). God's greatest gift is a restored relationship with Himself, delivering us from hell and granting us entry into Heaven (John 3:36). This gift depends not on our merit but solely on Christ's work of grace for us on the cross (Titus 3:5).
6. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). We must admit our wrongdoing, and ask God's forgiveness: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Then we are to affirm to others that the resurrected Jesus is our Lord.
7. "Whoever hears My Word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). The life we long for is freely offered to us in Christ. We can believe His promise and call on Him to save us, humbly accepting His gift of eternal life: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

If you believe Jesus Christ loves you, and would like to ask Him to forgive you and receive salvation, pray this prayer with me. It's as simple as A-B-C: Admit, Believe, Confess.

"Dear God, I ADMIT that I'm a sinner and the penalty of my sin is death. I BELIEVE that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that He died and rose from the dead for my sin. And I CONFESS Jesus as my Savior. Please forgive me. I repent of my sin and surrender my life to You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen."
— Miles McPherson, senior pastor and former NFL player


If you've said this prayer text "Surrender" to 73738 to receive the next steps in your walk with God.




ADAM THIELEN

"THEREFORE, DO NOT WORRY ABOUT TOMORROW, FOR TOMORROW WILL WORRY ABOUT ITSELF. EACH DAY HAS ENOUGH TROUBLE OF ITS OWN." – MATTHEW 6:34

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